



Issue 5 | October - December 2013

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APONJON

NEWS



- Aponjon at a glance 2013
- **Aponjon and NHSDP work together for mothers' health**
- Aponjon enriched with 200,000 subscribers
- **Aponjon messages in local dialects**
- Aponjon at mHealth Summit 2013
- **Aponjon gets visibility in Lal Teer's New Year's calendar**
- 'Sathi Apa' is talking about Aponjon
- **Rumi Das and Aponjon**



Aponjon at a glance 2013

Aponjon—the mobile phone-based health information service for expecting and new mothers and their babies—had a great run in 2013. Aponjon, under the auspices of the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Health (MAMA) initiative and funded by USAID, has been working diligently at developing maternal health services and has some great achievements to share for 2013.

After the national launch in December 2012, MAMA Bangladesh (Aponjon) unleashed its mass communication strategy on January 23, 2013. Vigorous plans and activities were rolled out to initiate a nationwide media campaign, which created quite a buzz in Bangladesh. The media campaign consisted of television commercials, radio commercials, newspaper advertisements and billboards in some of the major divisional cities for 3 months.

The objective of this media campaign was to reach out to a maximum number of people regarding the Aponjon initiative. The media campaign was directed at explaining the service benefits, promoting the sole short code—16227—for accessing the service and creating brand awareness and a visual identity of the brand. The media campaign made quite an impact among families with expecting mothers or newborn children.

We created a website for Aponjon in March and within less than a month it had generated more than 4.5 million views and 11,000 clicks. At present, more than 10,000 Facebook users have “liked” the Aponjon Facebook page and are connected with Aponjon.

In April 2013, the USAID-funded Aponjon service introduced “Sponsor-a-Mother” gift packs at the Agora Gulshan (RM Center) outlet in partnership with Dnet. By purchasing a gift pack, an individual can help an underprivileged mother receive the Aponjon mobile health service free of cost. People have shown interest in buying this pack to contribute to the underprivileged people.

May 28 is celebrated as National Safe Motherhood Day in Bangladesh. To mark this occasion in 2013, a

fair was organized by the Directorate General of Family Planning and Channel I, one of the most popular satellite television channels. The program was inaugurated by the Honorable State Minister, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Capt. (Rtd.) Mozibur Rahman Fakir, MP.

In response to demand from subscribers, a new service—Aponjon Counseling Line—was deployed in June 2013. After a 3 month test run, this service was thrown open for all subscribers on a round-the-clock basis. This new dimension of Aponjon’s service allows any Aponjon subscriber to dial 16227 and talk to an Aponjon doctor about any queries the subscriber may have regarding health and other problems during pregnancy, as well as health- and nutrition-related issues for an infant up to 1 year of age.

Also in June 2013, Aponjon arranged an “Aponjon Fair” for the first time in Brahmanbaria. Thereafter, throughout 2013, such fairs were organized in different districts of Bangladesh and were appreciated by all. At the Aponjon fairs, a doctor answers any pregnancy- and neonatal-related questions that visitors might have and distributes medicines free of cost to the expecting and new mothers in the locality.

In July 2013, Aponjon won an mBillionth Award. The mBillionth Award recognizes South Asian countries’ outstanding initiatives that use mobile technology. Aponjon is the first nationally implemented program delivering health information services through mobile technology and recognized by mBillionth in South Asia as the leader in mobile technology. On July 18, 2013 Shamarukh Alam, Program Director of Dnet, received the mBillionth award in Delhi, India.

In October 2013, Aponjon unveiled its new television commercial. At the same time, Aponjon and its services were highlighted on billboards, placards and walls throughout the country. At the end of 2013, in November, Aponjon acquired its 200,000th subscriber, achieving another milestone within a year of its nationwide launch.

In December 2013, four members from the Aponjon team took part in the fifth annual mHealth Summit. The Summit, billed as the largest mobile health event in the world, was held in the Washington, D.C. area

and presented by Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society in partnership with the National Institutes of Health, the mHealth Alliance and the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health. Almost 5,000 participants from different sectors across the mHealth ecosystem—including health and technology influencers, developers, policymakers and business leaders—took part in the summit, offering a glimpse of the latest in mobile and wireless health technology developments, policies, apps, systems and startup companies. At the summit, Hasan Muhammed Zahidul Amin, Head of Technology at Dnet, was a keynote speaker on “Dynamic Dashboard for informatics and service performance with big data of Aponjon health service.”

In 2014, the Aponjon team is determined to maintain its presence in the consciousness of the people through an effective mass media campaign and by providing exemplary health-related information to pregnant and new mothers.



Aponjon team in active mode throughout the year 2013

health information for expecting and new mothers through mobile phone
Mother & child's Aponjon, Call 16 22 7 for registration

Aponjon and NHSDP work together for mothers' health

Aponjon and the NGO Health Service Delivery Project (NHSDP) have been working together since the beginning of 2013. Before 2013, Aponjon worked with Smiling Sun Franchise Program or SSFP, which evolved into NHSDP. Recently, through mutual discussion and interaction, the alliance has become stronger and more prominent. The Aponjon team contacted Dr. Halida H. Akhter, Chief of Party of NHSDP, for an interview. In this issue's interview section, we bring you key parts of our discussion.

Aponjon: What created your interest in Aponjon at the very beginning?

Halida Akhter: NHSDP reflected on a number of important issues before signing the contract with Aponjon. Most of the people of our country live in the villages. And it is often seen that in case of complicated pregnancies, professional medical advice is not sought. In this context, Aponjon has taken a bold step to create awareness.

Very often, due to ignorance, rural women neglect different physical and medical problems. This negligence often leads to maternal and neonatal deaths. Aponjon is providing some worthwhile health information to its clients through voice or text messages every week. These messages are helping them improve their behavioral practices as well as helping them identify and be aware of critical medical problems. They are getting all this information through messages that they get sitting at home, through mobile phones. Considering the social infrastructure of our country, this is really a positive and welcome change.

Mobile phone is the new element of affordable technology which has made its way to almost every household, where every household has at least one mobile phone. This technology has made it possible to extend health care facilities to the remotest of areas in the country.

Also, our health workers when visiting their work areas inform villagers about Aponjon and register them as subscribers. Due to the awareness that the subscribers get through the Aponjon messages, they come to our health centers to access health

services. This is a positive example of working in partnership in the health sector. NHSDP, through its health center program, has nearly 10,000 satellite clinics all over the country. Health workers, when working in their areas, always highlight the importance of taking these medical advices and acting upon them, which helps representation of Aponjon to all.

Aponjon: What are the issues that you have emphasized when working in partnership with Aponjon, and why?

HA: We already work on neonatal health. And you [Aponjon] are working on maternal and neonatal health. So we didn't take long to decide that we can work together on this. And, for the record, with support from USAID, Smiling Sun clinics had been working with Aponjon from the very beginning as partners.

So through restructuring, as we began working under the new name, "NGO Health Service Delivery Project," we got into a fresh agreement with Aponjon.

Aponjon: How do you think that the two programs can engage each other and work together to ensure optimum health care for the underprivileged?

HA: If Aponjon messages advise the clients to seek medical care from health centers, people living near Smiling Sun clinics can reach service there. This can pave the way to a joint health care delivery channel. This is how Aponjon can help clients from remote areas of the country to access positive health care in the shortest possible time.

Aponjon: Since NHSDP works at field level in all the



The discussion between Aponjon team members and Halida H. Akhter

districts of the country, could you tell us how people respond to the Aponjon service in the rural context?

HA: The importance of women in the social structure of Bangladesh has not yet reached the level of that of men. The rural society still has a huge number of examples of domestic violence on women. The violence is more intense during pregnancy, since the women are weaker and more vulnerable during this time. At these times, when the Aponjon messages arrive through the mobile phones, emphasizing the well-being of the mother for a healthy child, everyone in the family starts taking the expecting mother's health issues seriously. Not only that, other than the message for mothers, Aponjon sends awareness messages to the mobile phones of the family members as well. This, in effect, helps the mother gain caring support from the family. This is a big advantage for them.

When the time of delivery draws near, the husband of the mother keeps in mind some issues like keeping aside savings or arranging for an ambulance. If we can increase the level of awareness of gatekeepers [husbands and other relatives of the pregnant and new mothers] in the community, we can further contribute to the reduction of the maternal mortality rate.

Aponjon: What issues do you think we can work on together in the future?

HA: I think we can continue our partnership with Aponjon. In the future, if Aponjon arranges trainings in a certain locality, they can arrange such trainings at the premises of our clinics, or potentially during Aponjon's initiatives on public communication. Thus we can mutually become beneficial to each other, especially since both our programs are USAID funded. If we can involve the government authorities further in our activities, and make our mutual efforts more visible to them, we can expand our services.

Aponjon: Thanks a lot for your time.

HA: Lots of good wishes for Aponjon. Thanks to you as well.

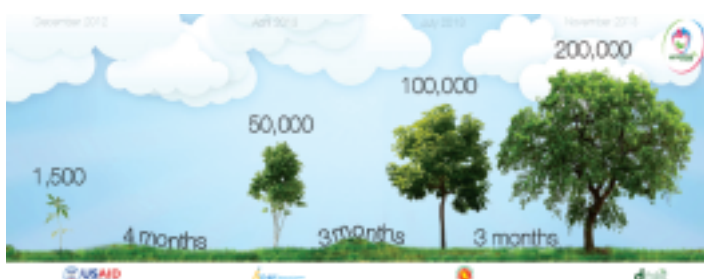


Halida H. Akhter, Chief of Party, NHSDP



Aponjon enriched with 200,000 subscribers

At the end of 2013, in November, Aponjon achieved the milestone of 200,000 subscribers, less than a year after the national launch. This success came only 4 months after registration of the 100,000th subscriber in the month of July. Furthermore, while it took Aponjon 6 months to reach the first 50,000 subscribers, the last 50,000 registrations took place in less than 2 months. To ensure every family's acceptance of the service is the next goal for Aponjon's team. To achieve the next milestone even faster, the team members of Aponjon are working with full effort. The dream of this team is to reach every corner of Bangladesh.



Communication material for Aponjon after achieving 200,000 subscribers

Aponjon messages in local dialects

The Aponjon messages will henceforth be delivered in the local dialects of Sylhet and Chittagong to better meet the needs of subscribers. Messages in local dialect will be available for both pregnant and new mothers. This step is a result of a survey conducted in 2013, wherein the subscribers suggested that messages delivered in their dialect would help them appreciate the service much better. So far, 550 voice messages have been prepared and recorded in local dialects.



Voice artist recording an Aponjon message in local dialect

Aponjon at mHealth Summit 2013

The fifth annual mHealth Summit took place on December 8–11, 2013, at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in the Washington, D.C. area. Aponjon participated in the summit. Hasan Muhammed Zahidul Amin, Head of Technology at Dnet, presented a keynote paper on “Dynamic Dashboard for informatics and service performance with big data of Aponjon health service.”

MAMA Global arranged a “MAMA Day” event, during which MAMA Bangladesh team members shared their learning and experiences, focusing on subscriber acquisition and business models. There were participants from MAMA Global, MAMA India, MAMA South Africa, Babycenter, and Johnson & Johnson. On behalf of the team, Dr. Ananya Raihan, Shamarukh Alam and Rizwana Rashid Auni spoke on different topics and gave an overall update of the program.



Hasan Muhammed Zahidul Amin presenting a paper at the mHealth Summit

The mHealth Summit brought together almost 5,000 health and technology influencers, developers, policymakers and business leaders from across the mHealth ecosystem, offering a glimpse into the latest in mobile and wireless health technology developments, policies, apps, systems and startup companies. More than 450 speakers explored critical topics across the global mHealth landscape. The summit was an intense 4-day experience that connected people passionate about contributing to a revolutionary change.

Aponjon gets visibility in Lal Teer's New Year's calendar

Aponjon and Lal Teer Seed Limited have been able to establish a mutually beneficial partnership. Lal Teer is a company of Multimode Group that distributes seeds to farmers at low cost, especially targeting rural women working on their own farms. Lal Teer publishes a calendar, which it distributes to such farmers, and has included Aponjon and its logo in the 2014 calendar. The calendar will be distributed to 200,000 farmers in all the 64 districts of Bangladesh, taking Aponjon's message further.



Lal Teer calendar 2014

'Sathi Apa' is talking about Aponjon

Aponjon recently completed producing a training film. The story is set in a rural context and has a lot of light-hearted moments. The film, directed by Ashfaq Nipun, is based on the daily life of a health worker and has the famous Bangladeshi actress, Tisha, playing the protagonist's role. At the beginning of 2014, this training film will be distributed among all

health workers and brand promoters, to help them with the Aponjon registration process and clarify any doubts they may have about the service. The film will be uploaded on Aponjon's official website, where it will be accessible to all and will help to spread the message of Aponjon.



Tisha on the set of Aponjon's training film

Rumi Das and Aponjon

Rumi Das lives in Potia, Chittagong. Recently, her baby daughter, Rashi, turned 1. Rumi made use of the Aponjon service for her baby's first year. She is appreciative of the health advice that she received as an Aponjon subscriber, since it helped her give better nutrition and take better care of Rashi. Rumi's husband, Ratan Das, had also subscribed to Aponjon as a gatekeeper and told us that the Aponjon messages had helped him take better care of his baby, especially with respect to the food to be given to his daughter.

Ratan, a schoolteacher, was so happy with Aponjon that he has suggested the Aponjon service to his colleagues and friends.



A smiling Aponjon subscriber and her baby

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